



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5

“Glastnost and Honesty in the Lord’s Work.”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Jerusalem and Judea. So in the first six verses he mentions that fact, and then he exhorted the Corinthians to give in a way that would be honoring to the Lord. And now, in verse 16, he turns to his plans for collecting the money from the Gentile churches for the poor believers in Jerusalem and Judea.

Sixteenth verse begins, “But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus.” Now, some of you may have a rendering that has the past tense for “puts” rather than the present. And the reason for this is that in the Greek manuscripts, at this point, there is a difference, and it’s doubtful exactly what Paul wrote in this case. But the truth, and we’ll make reference to the truth involved, is the same under any circumstances whether the apostle meant he put this earnestness in the heart of Titus in the past or whether he continually does it, the emphasis is upon the fact that it is God who does it.

“For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord. And we have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches; and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is

being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness, taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”

Now, you can recognize, as the apostle is writing these words, that he is writing them in such way that those who receive the letter will be able to read what Paul wrote and interpret it in the light of the fact that it has been brought to them by Titus and the two brethren that Paul mentions here. And when he says in verse 18, “And we have sent along with him the brother,” of course they would be reading it in Corinth, and they would be reading, “And we have sent along with him the brother.” And they would look and they would see the brother that Paul refers to here together with Titus. And then now he will go on and mention still another who is to come with them. In verse 22 he continues,

“And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren,” (that is, the two that are traveling with him) “they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ.”

Now, that word “messengers” is the word that is used in the New Testament for apostles, and so literally they are called apostles of the churches. And we’ll have something to say about that later on, but I want you particularly to notice it. They are apostles of the churches, a glory to Christ. “Therefore openly before the churches,” he exhorts the Corinthians, “show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting

about you.” That is, that they were prepared to give and would give for the poor saints in Judea.

The 9th chapter is really a continuation of this, and he goes on to say,

“For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them.”

Now, to understand why he uses the term “Achaia” instead of Corinth, there were other churches in that part of Greece which was known as Achaia, the southern part of Greece. In fact, there was another church very near Corinth mentioned in the epistle to the Romans. So he uses the term “Achaia” and not Corinthians or Corinth because he wants to include the territory and evidently all of them were making contributions to the poor saints in Jerusalem. The third verse of chapter 9,

“But I have sent the brethren, that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, that as I was saying, you may be prepared; lest if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we -- not to speak of you -- should be put to shame by this confidence. So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, that the same might be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness.”

That’s a very interesting expression, “not affected by covetousness.” There are two ways to take it, but I think it’s a little sounder to take it as the apostle saying, I want this gift to be voluntarily given, and I don’t want it to be wrung out of you as giving is often wrung out of people by exhortations to such an extent that they give when they really don’t want to give. So he doesn’t want it to be covetousness as it were a gift of

covetousness that is something they really don’t want to give they’d like to keep for themselves, but they are embarrassed enough to go ahead and give. I know none of you have ever felt that way when appeals have been made for money. You’ve always given, just given, generously of your own free will, and you’ve never felt I’d better give something but I really don’t want to. You’ve never felt that way, have you? I have. [Laughter] So this is public confession. May the Lord bless this reading of his word. And let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee that such mundane matters as the ways in which the apostle conducted their everyday business are found in the Scriptures for they give us such marvelous insights into the principles that guided them in their everyday Christian activity which must have seemed to the people of Paul’s day as a matter-of-fact task. The taking of the gifts of Christian believers from the Gentile churches to Jerusalem and Judea to help those who had suffered financially and economically by reason of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for the way in which this does illustrate, as Paul apparently wished that it would, the oneness that exists in the body of Christ. Wherever we are, we belong to one another over the face of this globe.

We thank Thee, Lord, for the unfolding of the truths of the word of God concerning the ministry of the Triune God to us. The Father, who planned our salvation in the ages of eternity past and elected us to it; the Son, who came to accomplish the atoning work by which the purpose might be successfully completed and finished; and the work of the Holy Spirit, who in concert with the Father and the Son applies the finished work to those for whom it was done.

We are grateful. We magnify the sovereign grace of our great God, the omnipotence that manifests all of the activities of the Godhead, the omniscience and all of the other attributes that make the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ so remarkable and special to us. We thank thee, Lord, for grace and goodness and mercy and justice

and holiness and righteousness, the love manifested to us in what Christ has done for us, and the assurance that this is ours for eternity.

We ask Thy blessing upon the whole body of Christ today, build us up in our faith and strengthen us and supply the needs that exist in the lives of so many who do not have the things that we have in the United States of America. We pray for our elders. Give them wisdom and guidance in the decisions that they have to make. We pray that Thy hand may be upon this assembly for spiritual good. Bless the outreach of the Chapel. We pray for its members and friends and especially the visitors with us today. May this be a special time for them as they listen to the word of God. Pray for our country. And we pray, too, Lord especially for those who’ve requested that our prayers, some who are bereaved, some sick and ill, and some who have difficult decisions to make and experiences that require divine guidance and divine enablement and sustenance. Lord, we ask that by Thy grace Thou wilt answer those petitions of the hearts in an affirmative way in accordance with Thy will. Be with us as we sing, as we listen to the word of God.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] This is the fourth of our series of messages on Christian giving. The topic that we have been using is “Grace Giving,” but today, in yielding a point to contemporary thought, I’ve subtitled it “Glasnost and Honesty in Christian Giving.”

Those of you who read the newspapers, you know that one of the new buzz words that is very popular in the United States is the Russian word that has been universalized by Mikhail Gorbachev - glasnost. It means “openness” or even better “public disclosure” in Russian. It’s a word that might be usefully employed in Christian ministries handling monies and embroiled in the scandalous shenanigans that have characterized the revelations of their dealings over the last few months.

I have a little folder that I have kept on much of these things because I sort of anticipated there would be quite an interesting collection of literature. And some of the titles of the pieces in the magazines and in the newspapers included these -- “PTL Sets Aside Two Hundred and Sixty-Five Thousand for Secretary,” another “TV’s Unholy Road, a Sex and Money Scandal Tarnishes Electronic Evangelism” that was in *Time* in April of this year, “TV Evangelists Beg from Luxury’s Lap.” That was an inkling of what might happen because that was in the paper about two and a half years ago when one couple, just after they had bought a house for a half of a million dollars and a Rolls-Royce and a cheaper car to run around in, a Mercedes, at the same time they got into the papers for that long before the scandal broke. And then, “Of God and Greed” in June of *Time* magazine. And believe it or not, even in the British magazine, *The Economist*, there was a rather lengthy article of a couple of pages entitled, “Praise the Lord and Pass the Loot.” [Laughter] So these are the types of things that we have been reading. I know you have been reading. I surely have been reading.

I listened to a radio interview -- well, it was a TV interview, a few months back in which one of the men who has been involved in the shenanigans was being quizzed by a well-known national TV reporter, news reporter or analyst. And in the course of the discussion the TV commentator asked, “Would you give me a financial report?” And after some hesitation, the man replied -- and I really could not tell whether he was doing this as a joke or not, but he said no he would not give him a report, but he would if he was willing to pay twenty dollars a month and join the club of five hundred thousand people who send in twenty dollars a month, then he would send them a financial report.

Evangelicals, as you may know, have their ECFA, the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability. Now, I am not against that organization, I think if you are going to engage in that kind of thing, which I don’t find in the Bible at all, it is good that you have some standards. Even among thieves, there should be some standards. [Laughter] And so the Evangelical Council of Financial Responsibility, made up of a lot of my friends,

by the way, I say yes you should have something like that because it could be a lot worse if you didn’t have that. And I’m happy to think that it is very doubtful that Jim and Tammy could join the ECFA.

But the question that I think about when I think about it is, Would Paul be a member of the ECFA? I doubt it. He didn’t exalt the tithe even, nor did he solicit money for himself. As a matter of fact, personal interest was not Paul’s thing at all. I don’t think -- I started to say he couldn’t be a good Democrat, but that would mean that I was taking political sides. As a matter of fact, all of our politicians have personal interests, of course. But when we come to questions of the things of the word of God, the apostle was not a person who was guided and motivated by personal interest. In fact, if there is anything that was foreign to the Apostle Paul it was personal interest.

Perhaps grudgingly the ECFA would have to approve his methods. That is, he couldn’t be a member, though I do believe that if he were a member, he would be absolutely unique among them. They would point him out and say, now we do have one fellow who has a strange method of raising support, he looks to the Lord. And he looks to the Lord alone. He doesn’t even send out any prayer letters. As a matter of fact, he just waits on the Lord, and we have allowed him to be a member of our organization because we cannot really find anything that he is doing that is really a violation of financial responsibility.

Now, one might say, Well, did Paul practice financial care and accountability? Well, actually Paul did. There are people who are lone wolves in the evangelical field who do not practice evangelical accountability or financial care and accountability. But the apostle practiced financial care and accountability. In fact, in his limited dealings it was all glasnost. Thank you, Mr. Gorbachev. Glasnost and honesty, it was openness and honesty with the apostle.

Now, I think we can see this in this passage that we are looking at, and that is why I’ve introduced it with this rather lengthy introduction and have done it in that way.

Now, what I’d like for you to do is now turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 8, verse 16 through verse 21, the first section of the Scripture reading in which Paul expresses his concern for openness and honesty.

Now, he had exhorted them in the opening part of the chapter -- rather in the immediately preceding part of the chapter. But in the opening part, he had said something about arrangements and so now he returns from the exhortation to the arrangements that he had mentioned in the opening verses of the chapter. And, first of all, he speaks about the earnestness of Titus. “Thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus for he not only accepted our appeal but being himself very earnest he has gone to you of his own accord.”

Now, the thing I’d like for you to notice about this is the statement, “thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness in the heart of Titus.” Now, that is a very revealing statement that the apostle has made. Of course, the very fact that Titus is here and that he has diligence is a thing that we want to note because diligent financial service by a man whose heart has been moved by God is a very needed thing. But the thing I’d like for you particularly to notice is that Paul says that it’s God who put the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus.

Now, there are three things about that statement that stand out to me. Number one and very important, that is, all acceptable godly affections proceed from the spirit of God. In other words, Titus didn’t think this up. Titus didn’t arrive at this of his own thought and will. Paul says that it’s God who put this earnestness on the behalf of the Corinthians in the heart of Titus.

Now, that principle we’ve labored and labored for years and, unfortunately, it still has not come home to some of us. One of the reasons for that is divine truth is only understood through divine illumination. But Paul puts it as plainly as it possibly can be put, he says it’s God who put this earnestness in the heart of Titus. He didn’t work it up of himself. But, further, the fact that God put this earnestness in the heart of Titus for the

poor saints in Jerusalem is evidence of God’s care for his people. Because what’s the point of putting this care for the poor in Jerusalem in the heart of Titus if God does it if it’s not an evidence that God cares for the poor in Jerusalem? So that’s the second thing that one can see from this statement. It is God who has a care for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

But there is something else that one can see reflecting upon this. Because think for a moment, it’s God who put this earnestness or diligence in the heart of Titus. So he does the work. He put this diligence in the heart of Titus for the poor, physically poor, economically poor in Jerusalem. And if he did that for the economically, physically poor, than surely he will do for the spiritual needs that the saints have as well.

In other words, one can see in this statement the evidence that he does the work, he always does the work, all work that is pleasing to God is ultimately traceable to him. It’s an evidence of his care for the saints and its evidence of the care for the saints both economically and spiritually. In other words, when God raises up individuals to care for the saints, it’s his work. He’s the one who raised his hand upon individuals, puts it in their heart to be helpful, and bless the saints that have been brought to the knowledge of the Lord by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. What a marvelous statement that is. “Thanks be to God who put that earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus.”

Now, the apostle goes on to express his foresight. He says in verse 18 through verse 21 that he does not want anyone to discredit the work of the Lord. Just think back over the past six months. That’s just the highlight. Actually, you could look back over the history of evangelicalism over the past seventy-five years, but we have had finally the out breaking of ways that have brought scandal to evangelical Christendom that have been striking widespread. In fact, all over the Western world people know about he things that have happened recently.

If we had simply read the Bible and followed the teaching of the word of God, there would never have been any of this. Listen to what Paul says, he says, “And we have

said along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches.” Now, I’m going to stop for a point or two as we go along and naturally you ask the question, well, who’s the brother that went with Titus down to Corinth and accompanied him with the gifts that had come from Macedonia to be gathered together with those that were to be offered in Achaia.

Who was the brother? Paul just mentions that he is the brother. Well, as you might expect, interpreters of the word of God have had a number of suggestions, all of them ultimately somewhat speculative. Perhaps the most common suggestion is that it was Luke because Luke was well-known to the people in Macedonia because when he traveled with the apostle we know he stayed in Philippi for a lengthy period of time. So he might well be the one to whom Paul refers here as the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches. On the other hand, Barnabas, Trophimus and others have been suggested. In the Anglican Church there was a collect, a prayer in which reference is made to Luke as the interpretation of the ritual of the Anglican Church. So it’s not an unwise suggestion to suggest that it was Luke.

Calvin says, however, that it is Barnabas, and of course if Calvin says it, that’s who it was, so we might say. [Laughter] You know, that reminds of Benjamin Jowett, he was a 19th Century Oxford head of one of the colleges of the university there, and he would only occasionally call in his dons to get their opinion, because if you’ve ever tried to deal with a group of academics or academicians, you’ll know that you are not going to get any agreement over anything, but one time he did end a meeting with his turbulent dons and he announced, we’ve had the discussion, the vote was twenty to one. I see that we are deadlocked. [Laughter, Johnson laughs] Well, if Calvin said it was Barnabas, I see we are deadlocked. Everybody else said somebody else. No, there were others, too, who thought it was Barnabas as well. We don’t know who it was, and I’m not going to say it was Barnabas. As a matter of fact, if I had to guess I would say it is probably Luke. But we just don’t know.

We do know this, that he was appointed by the churches. And he says in the 19th verse and not only this but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our readiness.

Now, that gives us an insight into the life of the earliest churches. That is, there was a harmony between them. It was the days before the division of the church into the church of the east and the church of the west. And the days before the division of the western church into the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church and in the days before the division of the Protestant churches into many different churches. And the churches were in harmony for the simple reason that they believe the same thing. That’s the only harmony that is true harmony. And so Paul welcomed the representatives from fellow churches.

Now, I think it is interesting, too, that this brother, whose fame is in the things of the gospel and has spread through all the churches, was evidently one who taught and preached the word of God. And in this group of individuals who are going to handle the money, there was also a minister of the word there.

Now, this morning I made a little offhand remark about, “it was a good idea to have preacher on the finance committee.” And one of the elders came up and gave me a friendly little rebuke as he sometimes does. And he says, “Lewis, there is no finance committee in the church of Jesus Christ. The Lord is the finance committee.” Well, of course I had to agree with him. That’s true. The Lord is the head of the church. In fact, he holds office in all of the committees and their committees of three, the trinity and that’s it.

But what I was referring to is simply this, that it is good to have someone who is dealing with money in the church who has an appreciation and a special appreciation of the spiritual side of the ministry because often we individuals who have been business men -- I know you don’t realize this but I used to work. [Laughter] I worked for about

eight years before I preached. That is, preached constantly. And I’ve seen a lot of businessmen conduct decisions according to principles that weren’t altogether biblical. Businessmen who are used to meeting a budget tend to get a little nervous when the funds get a little low, whereas some other individuals having passed through that experience a number of times and having seen the Lord supply their needs maybe are not quite as nervous when the funds begin to dwindle a bit. So it’s good to have both types. I’ve seen, on the other hand, many fellows who haven’t conducted their affairs in a very businesslike way, that is, a very orderly way, and that is something we decry as well.

But this brother is a brother who is accomplished in the gospel who is part of this little group of individuals who are handling these monies. Now, in the 20th verse the apostle calls it a very generous gift. He said taking precaution that no one discredit us in our administration of this generous gift. So what we have here is something like this. We have the people in Macedonia and Northern Greece who have taken up or who have given -- there is not indication there was a collection taken up, but they gave in order to help the poor in Jerusalem.

Now, the apostle could have taken the money down to Achaia, or he could have had Titus take the money down to Achaia. But he wasn’t satisfied with one man handling those funds. In fact, he wasn’t satisfied with two men handling those funds. So when Titus went south with the money, two men went with him. In other words, they were careful. This is called Evangelical Brinks. [Laughter] One fellow carrying the money, the other two riding alongside. Well, I don’t know what they had, we Texans would say he probably had a holster and whatever else. Well, anyway, I’m sure they didn’t have any of that, but they were careful. And you can see in this the fact that the apostle is very wise because it is so easy for men to be tempted and to do something that is out of harmony with the word of God.

And in the 21st verse Paul tells us why he did all of this. He says, “For we have regard for what is honorable,” actually that Greek word means something like noble, “We

have regard for what is honorable,” or noble “not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.” What a marvelous fellow the Apostle Paul was. He could sit down with his pen, and he could write a letter to the Colossians, and there will be a passage in it in verse 15 through verse 20 in the first chapter, and scholars will study it, and they will say this is one of the hymns that the early church must have sung. It is written in such a lyrical fashion.

He wrote the great section in Philippians 2 that we studied recently on Wednesday nights. And that, too, has been called a Christian hymn, something that they sang. Paul wrote those things. It’s very difficult to prove that the apostle did not write them. In fact, all the evidence points to the Pauline authorship of them. In fact, the apostle, every now and then, does lapse into or rise to the poetry of a lyrical poem. So here is a man who is a lyric poet, he is a theologian, and he acts with the meticulous care of a chartered accountant and a banker. All of these magnificent gifts gathered into this man.

Now, I’d like for you to notice also that when he says, “they do things honorable not only in the sight of the Lord, but in the sight of men,” that is a very important point. I know of course that most important it is that we do things honorably in the sight of God. But to do them in the sight of men as well is a legitimate goal and aim. And so the apostle is seeking to have this gift taken to the poor in Jerusalem in such a way that no one would ever be able to say those fellows have been dipping their hands into the pot.

Mr. Phillips renders that 21st verse this way, “Naturally we want to avoid the slightest breath of criticism in the distribution of their gifts and to be absolutely above board not only in the sight of God but in the eyes of men.”

I have a friend in the ministry. He has been a pastor in several important churches including the Moody church. I made reference to him recently. Warren Wiersbe, he is now head of the Back to the Bible ministries in Lincoln, Nebraska. Mr. Wiersbe was a pastor of a church in which I held a week of meetings in Covington,

Kentucky, some years ago, a very large church. He has been a very successful teacher and preacher of the word.

He says that in one of his churches he noticed in one of the Sunday school classes that there was a young man, one young man, who was taking up the offering, counting it, recording it, and then taking it to the Sunday school office. He said he went to the young man he said in a non-threatening way, I suggested that he was putting himself into a dangerous position, that he was handling the money and I, he said, had no doubt that he was handling the money honestly, but I suggested to him that while we may be able to trust you, and I certainly trust you, it is true that there are often people who are watching in our churches looking for something to criticize, and you put yourself in a dangerous position. Well, the young man reacted by becoming very angry and leaving the church. But here is a situation precisely like that. You might have said, well, surely Titus is dependable after all he is the apostle’s legate, but Paul said, no, not Titus only. Let’s get somebody from the churches, lest the people over here in Philippi say that we in Thessalonica are not handling things correctly, and let’s get somebody else too. So at least three of the men take the money from northern Greece to southern Greece.

Now, that is an illustration of handling things honorably in the sight of the Lord and in the sight of men, taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift. This is where the Bakkers and the Robertsons and the Tiltons and others have been failing and still others beside them as well. These principles are valid principles in the word of God, and we ought to handle them, handle our affairs in that way. And if you find some way in which the elders have not been handling the funds of the Chapel properly, go to the elders. I feel that they will respond favorably to anything that will enable them to do precisely this, to do things in an honorable way not only in the sight of the Lord but in the sight of men.

Having had experience in churches, I know that these difficulties do arise. I was pastor of a church at one time in which the treasurer himself began to dip into the funds

of the local church. Fortunately, it was discovered quickly. He quickly confessed. He was a Christian man and was able to pay it back. And as a matter of fact, the congregation as such did not find out about it. It was a small amount, but nevertheless, that is the way in which large difficulties begin.

In verses 22 through 24, Paul expresses his concern for the brethren. He states, “And we have sent with him our brother whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, and now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you. As for our brethren, they are apostles of the churches, a glory to Christ.” One might ask, well, what is Titus’ position? Paul calls him his partner, his fellow worker.

Well, you know when you read about Timothy and Titus in the New Testament you often have people say now these were young pastors of churches. There is not the slightest evidence for that. In fact, as I have said there is not the slightest evidence there is such a thing as the office of pastor/teacher. Now, I challenge anyone to give me evidence of such. There are three offices taught in the New Testament. The office of elder, the office of deacon held by certain individuals, and then the office of priest into which all of us have been installed when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those are the only offices in the New Testament.

Paul never wrote an epistle to a pastor of a church as if he held an office and had responsibilities as an officer. Now, of course it is possible for an elder to have the spiritual gift of pastor/teacher, or the spiritual gift of teaching, and Paul makes reference to two kinds of elders in that sense. There are all the elders rule, some of the elders also specially labor in the word and doctrine, but they are always simply elders. In other words, the rule in the church is not through one person, it’s through a body of elders.

Now when we read here that Titus is his partner and his fellow worker and he’s not called an apostle, we are forced to conclude as the great majority of New Testament scholars do conclude that Timothy and Titus had a special relationship to the Apostle

Paul. They were his personal representatives. They were what we call apostolic legates. That is, he asked them to perform tasks for him, and they did those tasks with Pauline apostolic authority behind them as they did their tasks. He sent Titus off to appoint elders, for example. And that was a task which apostles did. But Titus did it as a representative of the Apostle Paul. They were apostolic legates.

That’s not something unique with me. I know some of you think, Dr. Johnson is the only person on the face of the earth that believes that. That’s not true. It’s not true at all. For example, the great Lutheran commentator R.C.H. Lenski uses those precise words. They are apostolic legates. So Paul acknowledges they are his partners. They are his fellow workers and as for the brethren, that is those other two fellows who are not even named, maybe Luke, maybe some other person, they are apostles of the churches; all the difference in the world between an apostle of Jesus Christ who ministers with the authority of Christ and the apostles of the churches who carry out specific tasks with only the authority of a church.

Now, the Jewish people used *shluchim* or *shluichim*. Those two words mean the same thing. *Sh'lach* in Hebrew means to send, and so *shluchim* were individuals who were sent on specific tasks. They were individuals, for example, who carried money just like individuals in Brinks carry money except they were known as individuals who carried money and they were called *shluchim*. Now, it would seem that these were something like that. They were apostles, they were sent ones but they were sent by the churches to perform a specific task, and that’s all. In that sense, we may have an apostle today.

If, for example, Believers Chapel should say to someone we would like for you to go to such and such a place and perform this task, you might say that that individual was a sent one from the Chapel and you could call him an apostle. But that’s entirely different from speaking of an apostle of Jesus Christ. These are called messengers or apostles of the churches, a glory of Christ. Therefore, Paul concludes in verse 24, “Openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting in you.”

Now the final verses of chapter 9, verse 1 through verse 5, speak of his concern that the giving may be voluntary as well as generous.

Isn’t it interesting, the apostle in the first part of chapter 8 has used the Macedonians as an illustration for those who are in Corinth, in Achaia? And he has also used the Achaia as an illustration for the Macedonians. So when the chapter begins with look how marvelously those Macedonians have given and you Corinthians ought to give likewise. They have given beyond their ability. They have given of their own accord. They have given sacrificially. And you should give. And now writing to the Corinthians -- well of course he had already said that, but now he let’s us know that he had told the Macedonians when he was up there about the plans of the Corinthians for giving. So he’s used them one against the other.

It’s almost as if he thought that might work. In other words, if he can pit the Macedonians against the Corinthians, maybe they will give in a generous way for the poor in Jerusalem. None of this is for themselves. That’s the important thing. He says it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints for I know your readiness for which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely that Achaia has been prepared since last year and your zeal has stirred up most of them. See in chapter 8 verse 1 he boasted about the Macedonians to those in Achaia. Now, he says when I was up there, I boasted about Achaia to the Macedonians. But I have sent the brethren that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case that as I was saying you may be prepared lest if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we not to speak of you, should be put to shame by this confidence. After all I have been telling them, you Corinthians, you people that live in Achaia, how you have been prepared to give generously and of your own free will to the saints in Jerusalem.

Now, if I come here and I find you haven’t gathered the collection, then I’m going to be put to shame. I’m going to be disgraced before my friends in Macedonia. Not to say you, you are going to be disgraced, too, because those Macedonians have given so

liberally. So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift that the same might be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness.

You see, in effect, what Paul has done is he’s gone surety for the Corinthians in his conversation with the Macedonians. And he wants them to make good their determination. His name is at stake. Theirs is at stake. And further, he wishes that the blessing promised may be truly a blessing, a real gift, not something wrung from them. No emotional picking of pockets in a collection when he arrives. He wants it all to be ready by the time that he gets there. And incidentally, that last expression and not affected by covetousness means he doesn’t want them to feel at all that when they gather the collection that he and others are greedy and rapacious. So he doesn’t want it to be affected by covetousness, or, as the French translation by Sagon says, *un acte d’avarice*, or an act of avarice.

It’s helpful for us to remember as Christians there are four ways to give, so one commentator has put it. We can give as a duty. That is, we feel we’ve got to give and so we give as a duty. You know how it is. You give just like you send your checks into the IRS. You have to do it. Maybe you’ve signed a pledge card and so you have your little card and you say I’ve got to give some money. Or if you are not under that kind of system and you have the freedom of the New Testament, you still can feel I’ve got to give some money. They are going to pass the collection plate tonight at the Lord’s table, so I’ve got to be able to put something in the plate. So really you are not giving of your own accord, as the apostle speaks here, but you are giving as if it’s a duty. That’s one way. In fact, it can be done with such bad grace that it probably would be just as well as if you didn’t give anything at all.

Or you may give to find self-satisfaction. That is, you get a kind of pleasant feeling when you put money in a collection plate. You ever felt that way?. There are people who will give a dollar to a beggar on the street and walk off thinking, I sure am

generous, and then they’ll say wait a minute that was only a dollar, but for a moment they enjoy the pleasure of having given something, that, is it’s essentially a selfish kind of giving. We give selfishly.

Or you may give, thirdly, in order to have some prestige among the saints or even among the world. Then as you give in order that people will think of you as a generous benefactor. And so you give if they put your name on a building. Or if you cannot give that much, at least put a plaque on a room. In fact, there was a Christian organization not too far from us that without thinking went into that particular motivation for giving after having existed under largely a voluntary thing and that caused an uproar among supporters. If you gave a certain amount of money they would put your name on a plaque in one of the rooms of the building. That kind of giving is for prestige. The gift is not given to help; it’s to glorify the giver. And, in fact, it probably would not be given at all if it were not given in that way. And some praise extracted for it.

Sometimes people give in order to develop credit with God, thinking that by giving they are making points with God in heaven. That’s their primary motivation.

But when the Bible speaks of giving, giving is the response of gratitude for God’s love and mercy shown to us in Christ. And, therefore, it should be of our own accord, free, moved by the Holy Spirit, just as Titus was moved by God the Holy Spirit to be diligent in the work that God gave him to do. That kind of giving under love’s compulsion is the kind of giving that pleases God in heaven. And if we don’t give that way then maybe we ought to get down by the side of our bed and ask God to give us that kind of appreciation for what he has done and the ability to give as Christians should give.

Well, the church today has its schemes, the wonders of the tithe. Isn’t it interesting, the Apostle Paul never even used the term “tithe” in all of his thirteen or fourteen letters, not once did the term tithe appear in anything that he ever wrote. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus mentions the tithe, but when he mentions it, it’s obvious

the Old Testament tithe is in view. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews mentions it about three times in three short verses. In chapter 7 when he is talking about Melchizedek meeting Abraham, even before the giving of the law. That’s all the New Testament says.

The church talks tithe, tithe, tithe, the wonders of the tithe, that expression even used by churches who put on their bulletins, the wonders of the tithe. I have one before me. The pledge system, every member canvases faith, promises etc., TV Evangelists now have their clubs and their membership in them, but the pattern of the New Testament is grace giving. It’s the kind of giving that pleases the Lord, and it’s the kind of giving that makes us like him.

May God help us to listen to what Paul has told us about Christian grace giving principles. If you are here today and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we invite you to recognize what the Scriptures say about you that you are a sinner, that you need a redeemer, you need the forgiveness of your sins, and that through Christ’s death on the cross there has been provided for you a way to receive freely. God gives freely. He gives according to the principles of grace giving. He has given Christ for sinners. Come to him and receive the gift of eternal life. May God in his marvelous grace through the Holy Spirit move your heart to receive that gift. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for these wonderful sentences that have come from the apostle which reveals so clearly and so helpfully the principles that guided the early church and this great man as he sought to found the churches and cause them to grow in the principles of the word of God. And we thank Thee, Lord, that the truth of God extended to even such little details as the taking of monies from Macedonia to Achaia and then on to Jerusalem for the help of the poor saints who were suffering there. May we be responsive to the word of God.

“Glasnost and Honesty in the Lord’s Work” by S. Lewis Johnson
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We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.